



Meeting with City of Eau Claire
Thursday, October 7, 2004, 10:00-11:30 AM

People in attendance

Brian Amundson, City of Eau Claire
Don Kush, Chippewa-Eau Claire Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO)
Ken Holte, SRF Consulting Group, Inc.
Brian Shorten, SRF Consulting Group, Inc.
Jeff Abboud, Wisconsin Department of Transportation (WisDOT) District 6
Jim Koenig, WisDOT District 6
Mark Ploederer, WisDOT District 6
Casey Newman, WisDOT
John Swissler, WisDOT
Ethan Johnson, WisDOT

- 1) Overview of WisDOT's meeting purpose and WisDOT's long-range plan, *Connections 2030*, by WisDOT staff: The meeting began at 10:00. WisDOT staff gave an overview of WisDOT's long-range plan *Connections 2030*. WisDOT noted that *Connections 2030* will discuss all the modes and that it will be corridors-based. WisDOT has been meeting with various stakeholders on a small-group basis. WisDOT is working on reaching out to the public more effectively by making better use of the internet and by the recent completion of a telephone survey. WisDOT noted that they will post all of its public outreach notes on the internet, and that they would like local governments to fill out the *Connections 2030* survey. WisDOT staff noted that its goal is to release a draft alternative plan to the public in July 2005 and to complete the final plan by 2006.
- 2) Gathering of input from the City of Eau Claire and the regional planning commission: Staff from the City of Eau Claire, the Chippewa-Eau Claire MPO and WisDOT staff discussed the following:

Connections 2030

The form and purpose of *Connections 2030* was discussed. WisDOT staff noted that the plan will examine important trends. For example, if car and truck fuel efficiencies drastically improve due to hybrid engine technology, what impacts on state transportation revenues might this have? The plan will also establish performance measures that will be used in the future to evaluate the state's transportation system. The plan won't make specific project recommendations. It will be fiscally constrained and may provide a range of possibilities for the state's future transportation system. WisDOT intends for the plan to have legislative input and support.

City of Eau Claire staff asked if Connections 2030 will focus more on pure intercity travel and less on local travel. WisDOT staff noted that both are important. For example, if a community is concerned about truck traffic on local roads, WisDOT would like to know about it. Chippewa-Eau Claire MPO staff noted that WisDOT has previously noted that local infrastructure issues will likely be addressed.

Access Management / Road Classification

City of Eau Claire staff noted that by the end of 2006 the bulk of the state trunk system in Eau Claire will be limited access. There is too much emphasis on limiting access -- this results in more traffic and congestion on local roads.

With state trunk highways being pushed to the outskirts of the city (e.g. Hwy 53 project), residents have to travel further on local roads to get to their destinations.

City of Eau Claire staff noted that there are inconsistencies in the hierarchy of roads. For example a road may be a state highway or a local road in the city, but when it crosses the urban boundary it becomes a county road. There are regional roads that the state has chosen to reduce in importance. Now there is a disconnect with local roads and limited access state highways. We need “regional roads”, too.

Chippewa-Eau Claire MPO staff noted the example of access to the Chippewa Valley Airport. As Eau Claire and Chippewa Falls grow, once rural roads are taking on higher volumes of traffic. But the county is still responsible for these roads that are now more urban in nature. County funding is stretched - it's not being adjusted. Chippewa-Eau Claire MPO knows that the state is re-examining road classifications in urban areas. But the state needs to look at rural areas, too. Changes in travel patterns need to be looked at.

City of Eau Claire staff feel we have an archaic system of classifying road responsibilities. They believe we need to think more regionally. The City of Eau Claire is always at loggerheads with neighboring towns. Funding used to be awarded based on total miles. Therefore we ended up with very few county roads in Eau Claire.

Infrastructure Improvements

City of Eau Claire staff don't see a major need for new highways in the next 20 years. But highway maintenance funding will be needed.

The Chippewa Valley Airport has needs that should be addressed to attract more service. For example, it's problematic to fly from Eau Claire to Grand Rapids, MI. Eau Claire needs better connectivity through Milwaukee or Chicago. We need to make business travel more convenient.

City of Eau Claire staff indicated that the area had received two TEA (Transportation Economic Assistance) grants for rail projects.

City of Eau Claire staff noted there is no passenger rail service and that it's not certain that demand is there for it.

CHIPPEWA-EAU CLAIRE MPO staff noted that a recent WisDOT study showed Eau Claire passenger rail service would add value to the Midwest Regional Rail System. In addition commuter rail could have promise - there's strong connectivity between the Eau Claire region and the Twin Cities.

WisDOT staff asked if the Met Council is looking at commuter rail east to Wisconsin?

WisDOT district staff indicated that the Met Council boundary ends at the state line.

Chippewa-Eau Claire MPO staff noted that the Met Council historically hasn't promoted activities that would lead to growth in Wisconsin at the expense of Minnesota.

WisDOT staff said that this attitude may be changing.

Chippewa-Eau Claire MPO staff indicated that there is truth to this statement. MnDOT is starting to recognize that bridge crossings are an issue due to capacity constraints.

City of Eau Claire staff noted that demand for freight rail service is diminished. The area lost one cold storage facility to Menomonie because Union Pacific abandoned their rail service.

TEA Grants / Local Roads Improvement Program

WisDOT staff said they had heard that the TEA program needs to focus on job retention, too - not just job creation.

City of Eau Claire staff indicated the problem with the TEA program is that it's too focused - it can't make "regional" improvements that might benefit a number of businesses. Eau Claire businesses are spread out and would benefit from a regional application of TEA program funding.

City of Eau Claire staff have heard from businesses that it's not always roads and railway improvements that make the most difference in encouraging job creation. Larger economic issues also are important.

Chippewa-Eau Claire MPO staff noted that TEA grants are perhaps most useful in smaller, rural communities.

WisDOT district staff also noted that TEA grants don't have a great deal of money to distribute to begin with.

City of Eau Claire staff indicated that the best state program is the Local Roads Improvement Program. It provides flexibility for cities, and there's not as much red tape to cut through.

WisDOT district staff wondered if the TEA program could function more like the Local Roads Improvement Program.

Intercity Bus Service / Local Transit

City of Eau Claire staff noted that Greyhound used to stop in downtown Eau Claire, but now stops on the outskirts of town. Eau Claire transit can't get out to the new Greyhound stop. Staff also indicated that the city needs a new transit center.

Chippewa-Eau Claire MPO staff noted that Janesville has a successful partnership with Greyhound and that they had built a new transit center.

WisDOT staff indicated that Janesville is struggling to hold onto that relationship.

City of Eau Claire staff said they've recently adjusted their fixed route system. Their biggest issue is paratransit - which is a combined city/county service. Paratransit's funding needs are increasing substantially

Chippewa-Eau Claire MPO staff said they are trying to do a better job of screening paratransit users. The biggest change has been that nursing homes used to have their own buses. They are getting rid of them and relying on the city/county service. Another aspect of the problem is that people prefer "door-to-door" service offered by paratransit over the city's fixed route system.

Chippewa-Eau Claire MPO staff also highlighted the issue of transit funding coming from multiple sources. It is difficult to get "pooled" funds to provide a combined, county-wide transit service.

Bicycle / Pedestrian Travel

City of Eau Claire staff wondered how the bicycle and pedestrian modes would be handled in an "intercity" plan.

WisDOT staff noted that the state has plans for both the bicycle and pedestrian modes. The state also provides assistance and guidance to communities. Connections 2030 isn't all about "intercity" travel. WisDOT has perspectives on local bicycle and pedestrian issues.

City of Eau Claire staff wondered how WisDOT's interest in the bicycle / pedestrian modes dovetails with the Department of Natural Resources' (DNR) trail program.

WisDOT staff indicated that WisDOT tries to cooperate with the DNR as much as possible. WisDOT provides additional analysis and recommendations to the DNR.

WisDOT staff also noted that intercity infrastructure does impact local facilities. So WisDOT wants to be cognizant of local concerns.

Chippewa-Eau Claire MPO staff asked if the most recent bicycle map was more of a “suitability” map.

WisDOT staff indicated that it was.

WisDOT district staff noted that communities in this region prefer separate bicycle facilities over shared facilities.

Eau Claire Comprehensive Plan

City of Eau Claire staff provided an overview of the city’s comprehensive plan that is being developed by the consulting firm SRF Consulting Group, Inc. The plan has a transportation component, and parts of it may have a state impact.

The plan will have a detailed bicycle network that is tied to state trails.

A city traffic model is nearing completion.

A future road functional class map has been created that identifies future desired interstate interchanges - especially along the Hwy 29 and Hwy 53 bypasses.

The plan also addresses access management policies. The plan includes shorter access spacing in the urban area than what the state probably wants to see. City of Eau Claire staff noted that interstates in urban areas end up carrying more and more local traffic.

The plan will include a downtown transit center and a utilities staging plan.

Smart Growth Planning

City of Eau Claire staff noted that current archaic annexation rules in the state prevent good, smart growth planning. Some downtown redevelopment is occurring, but growth on the urban fringes may curtail this. Land on the fringes is cheaper.

City of Eau Claire staff noted that the city has very few interstate business routes. For example, Hwy 12 in Eau Claire (Clairemont Ave.) should be identified as “Business I-94”.

WisDOT staff asked if the city has a relationship with its school district to allow for better planning of new schools.

WisDOT district staff noted that it’s the smaller school districts in the region that catch them off-guard.